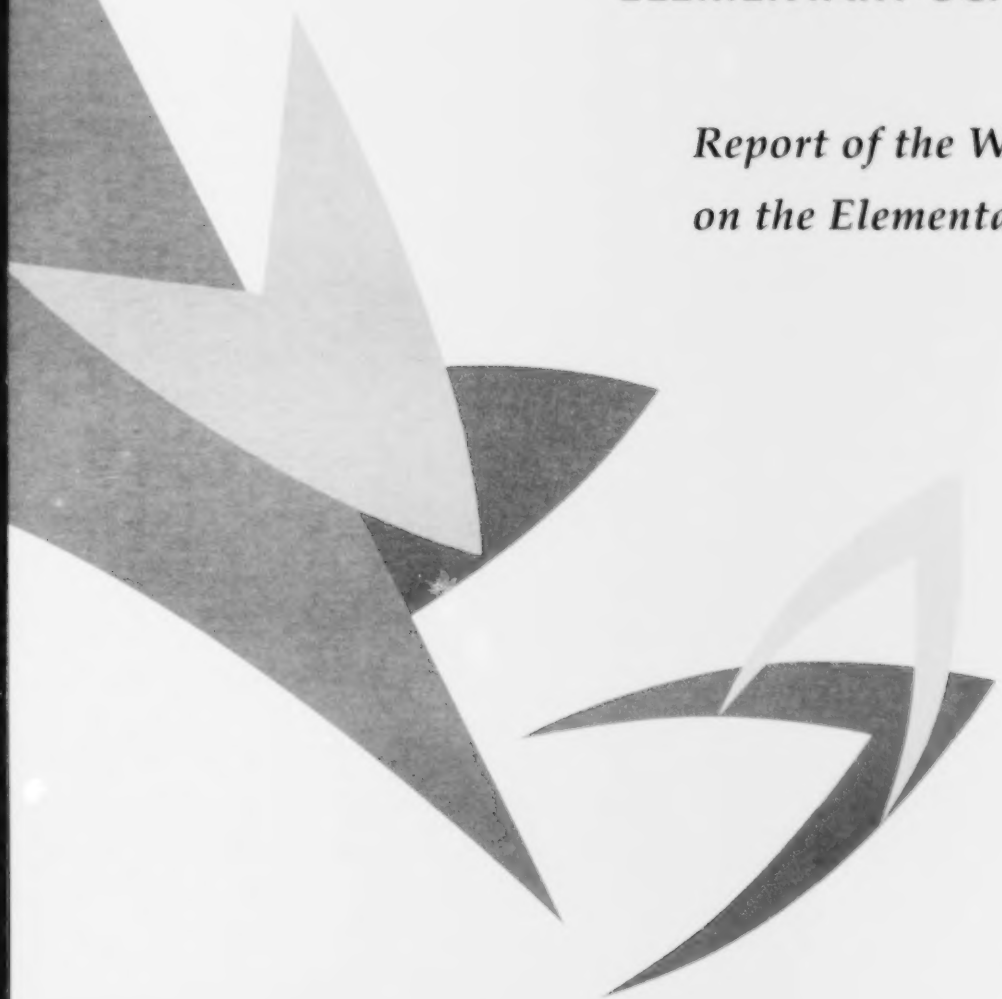
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION 2010
Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum

SUPPORTING LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ONTARIO'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Report of the Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum



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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant :
Pour appuyer l'apprentissage et l'enseignement dans les écoles élémentaires de l'Ontario : Rapport du Groupe de travail sur le curriculum de l'élémentaire.

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

PREFACE

The Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum was appointed by the Minister of Education, in consultation with the Curriculum Council, to examine the elementary curriculum in general and to respond in particular to concerns that the curriculum is "overcrowded".

The Curriculum Council began its investigation into the elementary curriculum in the fall of 2008 with a preliminary review of interjurisdictional research, as well as discussions with branch representatives of the Ministry of Education about current work being done in connection with the elementary curriculum. In the spring of 2009, it convened the working group to gather further information and provide expert advice to inform its deliberations.

The findings of the working group will provide a foundation for the Curriculum Council as it develops advice regarding the curriculum for the Minister of Education. This advice will inform the development of policies that will be reflected in the elementary component of a new ministry document outlining policies and programs for Ontario schools, from Grade 1 to Grade 12.

The working group was co-chaired by Jean-Luc Bernard, Director of Education, Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest, and Gerry Connelly, former Director of Education, Toronto District School Board. The co-chairs acknowledge with thanks the contributions of the working group members, who provided expertise and a broad range of perspectives from across the province:

Kathy Broad
Executive Director, Initial Teacher Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education / University of Toronto

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Brief biographies of the co-chairs and working group members are provided in Appendix A.

Acknowledgement

The Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum acknowledges with gratitude the contributions of the many hundreds of students, parents, community members, teachers, principals, supervisory officers, and education and community organizations across Ontario who participated in this important process. Their valued insights and perspectives are reflected in this report and its recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Background and Process

From the spring of 2009 until February 2010, the Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum gathered information and ideas about the elementary curriculum, as mandated by the Curriculum Council. Its work comprised a review of curriculum trends and practices in Canada and around the world and a series of consultations throughout Ontario to gather perspectives and insights on Ontario's curriculum for Grades 1 to 8 and ideas about learning and teaching in Ontario's elementary schools.

The working group conducted its consultations in two phases. The first phase involved a preliminary public survey on the elementary curriculum and discussions with a focus group of teachers. The working group also reviewed research from other jurisdictions to gain insight into emerging drivers of curriculum reform. The results of this phase informed the development of the discussion paper *Supporting Learning and Teaching in Ontario's Elementary Schools*.

During the second phase, which started in the fall of 2009, an electronic survey, based on questions included in the discussion paper, was posted in English and French on the ministry website to gather the responses of students, parents, parent groups, educators, school boards, and other interested members of the Ontario public. In addition, several focus groups were convened to gather responses to the questions.

THE ONTARIO CURRICULUM

The Ministry of Education is responsible for developing Ontario's elementary and secondary curriculum. Teachers use the curriculum policy documents and other ministry policies and resources to develop classroom programs. The Ontario curriculum is designed to help every student reach his or her full potential through a program of learning that is coherent, relevant, and age-appropriate. The curriculum recognizes that, today and in the future, students need to be critically literate in order to synthesize information, make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and thrive in an ever-changing global community. The curriculum also recognizes that the needs of learners are diverse, and provides all learners opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, and perspectives they need to be informed, productive, caring, responsible, healthy, and active citizens in their own communities and in the world.

Context

The Ontario curriculum for Grades 1 to 12 outlines expectations for student learning – what students are expected to know and to be able to do – for each grade in each of a number of subjects and disciplines. The curriculum has evolved over time to meet the needs of students, to respond to input from teachers, and to address greater demand for public accountability.

Since the provincial curriculum was first introduced, teachers have strived to design classroom programs to meet all of the expectations within each grade. Ministry curriculum reviews, which began in 2003, have responded to the need, expressed by teachers over time, to have fewer expectations and a greater focus on developing understanding of the key concepts in each subject area. In recent years, the ministry has also focused on providing professional learning and resources to support teachers as they continue to develop classroom programs that help students meet the curriculum expectations in a way that develops deep understanding, emphasizes the purpose of what students are learning, and engages students who have diverse needs. In addition, an emphasis across the curriculum on literacy and numeracy as foundational skills has resulted in continuous improvement in student achievement.

The results of the working group's consultations indicate that the trend towards focusing on a deeper understanding of the core concepts in each subject, and on "big ideas" that help students see the relevance of their learning, help to engage students more fully in their learning and should therefore continue.

The Content of This Report

This report summarizes the key findings of the Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum. The working group acknowledges the excellent work currently being done in Ontario schools and school boards to support curriculum implementation, and highlights some promising program-delivery practices that are being offered by educators today, as well their suggestions and ideas to support future curriculum implementation. The report concludes with the working group's recommendations for improving the elementary curriculum in Ontario, for the Curriculum Council's consideration.

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KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings arising from the review of interjurisdictional research, consultations, focus groups, and surveys conducted by the Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum during 2009.

The Issue of the Overcrowded Curriculum

The majority of participants considered the curriculum to be overcrowded. In giving examples of "overcrowding" in the curriculum, most participants referred to the number of expectations, particularly specific expectations. Some mentioned that there is not enough time – in the school day, term, and year – to ensure that all the curriculum expectations are covered in instruction and that students' diverse learning needs are addressed. For some educators, "overcrowdedness" was the result of a lack of connections in the curriculum among content and skills associated with different subjects and grades.

Participants tended to see curriculum in a broad sense as the sum total of program-related activities, experiences, and learning opportunities, both formal and informal, for which a teacher takes responsibility. Consequently, perceptions of "overcrowding" were related not only to the amount of academic content to be covered but also to the need to address social, physical, emotional, cultural, and developmental aspects of learning. Participants also referred to the responsibility of teachers to take into account various school, board, and ministry initiatives that have an impact on student learning. Judging from the feedback, teachers are looking for effective ways of integrating such initiatives into curriculum planning and programming.

INTERJURISDICTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Similar concerns about "overcrowding" can be found in other jurisdictions. For example, the United Kingdom has just completed a review of its primary curriculum in order to address the perceived need for a reduction in content and to provide greater flexibility in programming. Saskatchewan has streamlined its curriculum, using an approach that links broad areas of learning to cross-curricular competencies and subject-specific goals and indicators. Other jurisdictions have successfully addressed the issue of flexible delivery. In Finland, for example, although there are more than fifteen subjects in the national core curriculum, schools can combine these as they choose in order to meet learners' needs.

Consultation and survey participants recommended consolidating specific expectations in order to reduce their number. They pointed out that trying to cover too many expectations could result in disjointed rather than coherent learning and would not help students develop deep understandings. The working group noted that the ministry's curriculum review process has in fact reduced the number of expectations in revised curricula. For example, the number of expectations in the elementary science and technology curriculum, released in 2007, was reduced by 20 per cent in order to allow for deeper learning of foundational concepts. Feedback from participants suggests that more streamlining would be welcomed.

Cross-Curricular Connections

Participants indicated that clustering expectations under cross-curricular "big ideas" would increase connections across subject areas, which would provide students with a context for more relevant learning. The development of a cross-curricular conceptual framework of "big ideas" was suggested in many of the focus groups. It was also suggested that such a framework would facilitate the integration of various ministry initiatives, such as environmental education and character education, into the curriculum and would help students build connections and deeper understandings.

Some school boards and schools have developed their own organizing frameworks of "big ideas" for use with the current curriculum as a tool to support planning. Such frameworks and related approaches are varied, but they all have in common the purpose of assisting teachers in making connections across subject areas so that learning can be more meaningful for students. Participants offered a number of descriptions of the concept of "big ideas" as used in their frameworks and models. For some, big ideas represented a skills continuum; for others, an outcomes framework; others still thought of them strictly as significant concepts in a given subject discipline. The range of interpretations and uses suggested that this concept requires further exploration and clarification.

The working group identified three categories into which cross-curricular "big ideas" could be grouped and which might be useful as organizers to guide further work in relation to "big ideas" in the curriculum. The three categories are as follows:

- themes (e.g., participatory democracy, environmental sustainability)
- life skills (e.g., critical and creative thinking, problem solving)
- values (e.g., respect, responsible citizenship)

The working group recognizes that the terms "themes", "life skills", and "values" will require further discussion and refinement and that they will need to be described more fully in order to be used meaningfully in the Ontario educational context. The working

CROSS-CURRICULAR "BIG IDEAS"

Cross-curricular "big ideas" go beyond facts or skills and focus on larger concepts, principles, and processes. Developing a deeper understanding of big ideas requires students to understand basic concepts, develop inquiry and problem-solving skills, and make connections between the concepts they are learning and the world beyond the classroom.

group suggests that an integrated cross-curricular approach could lead to deeper, richer learning, but it also acknowledges the importance of maintaining the integrity of the subject-based knowledge in the Ontario curriculum.

Participants also expressed interest in possible tools that would help them identify connections across the curriculum, based on cross-curricular "big ideas". Teachers requested tools for program planning and building integrated programs of study that would reflect and expand on the excellent tools already available for use with the current curriculum. Teachers would also welcome electronic tools that would enable them to cluster expectations from various subjects around cross-curricular "big ideas". Such tools would support cross-curricular planning within and across grades and would enable teachers to work more effectively in combined grade and multi-grade classroom settings.

The working group suggests that the valuable information and the various models received during the consultation process be taken into consideration by the ministry as it moves forward to explore and clarify the concept of cross-curricular "big ideas".

Focus in the Curriculum

Participants overwhelmingly identified literacy and numeracy as the critical foundation for all other academic achievement and for lifelong learning. Asked to identify other areas that need to be focused on to a greater degree in the elementary curriculum, participants cited learning skills, problem-solving skills, and work habits. Students in particular identified their need for good learning skills and work habits, in addition to creative and critical thinking skills and the ability to be caring, responsible people with good social skills. Some participants also indicated that, in the digital age, attention to the areas of technology and information technology is necessary to engage students.

Among reasons cited for these choices were the following:

- Literacy and numeracy were often seen as the basis for success in other subjects, the foundation for learning, and central to learning and life.
- Life skills, such as problem solving, thinking creatively, and using good learning skills and work habits, were seen as critical in the twenty-first century for lifelong learning and success in life, as well as preparing students to be responsible, active citizens.
- Most participants emphasized the importance of preparing students to be responsible, empathetic adults, in addition to ensuring that they were competent, creative learners.
- Some students indicated that they chose "becoming a caring and responsible person and citizen" and "having good learning skills and work habits" because they believe these contribute to working well with others, getting a job, and taking on responsibility.

Learning and Teaching

Educators want a flexible provincial curriculum that allows them to adjust the pace and focus of teaching, so that they can better respond to the distinct needs of their students and communities. The working group noted the importance of continuing to recognize the high level of professional judgement that teachers exercise in planning programs to meet student needs.

Teachers use the curriculum to build and deliver a program of learning in the classroom. Some educators indicated that they use a variety of strategies, such as vertical and horizontal curriculum scans, curriculum mapping, and a focus on "big ideas", to create connections in the current curriculum that enable them to combine expectations in a meaningful way.

Many teachers expressed the need for more flexibility in curriculum delivery because of the importance of varying the pace of delivery and using a variety of instructional strategies to meet the individual needs of students. Others felt the current curriculum allows for flexibility in delivery. The working group noted participants' suggestions that this potential for flexibility should be communicated more broadly to educators in the field. The working group also noted that it is important to build a shared understanding of revised curriculum as part of the implementation process.

Educators suggested that a reduction in the number of expectations and a greater focus on increasing understanding of key subject concepts would give teachers the flexibility to slow the pace of curriculum delivery, thereby benefiting students. Some teachers and parents felt that focusing on foundational skills in the Primary Division would better prepare students for success in the junior and intermediate grades.

Participants further suggested that, when new initiatives are introduced, explicit connections should be identified between those initiatives and the curriculum. Making teachers aware of such connections would support the integration of the initiatives in program planning. Teachers referred to the "Scope and Sequence" document released by the ministry to support the implementation of environmental education as an example, because it makes explicit the learning opportunities and expectations in the curriculum that relate to environmental education.

Many teachers suggested developing and sharing integrated programs of study. Such programs could be adapted for particular classrooms, so that they would be personally meaningful, culturally relevant, and developmentally appropriate and would meet the learning needs of the students. Participants also indicated that providing models that illustrate cross-curricular integration by grade, and that make explicit links between expectations, would be useful.

Teachers indicated that they would appreciate tools that support and facilitate the teaching of combined grades. It should be recognized that in some regions of the province combined grade and multi-grade classrooms are more prevalent than in others. Providing more support for learning and teaching – for combined grades, for differentiated instruction, and for students with diverse needs, interests, and styles of learning – is an important consideration in future curriculum revisions.

In addition, participants pointed out that elementary teachers are often called upon to deliver all subjects in the curriculum, and some indicated that they would welcome support from specialist teachers in areas such as the arts and health and physical education. Teachers identified a need for more time for job-embedded professional learning to develop subject knowledge and integrated programs.

Engaging Students in Their Learning

The working group asked participants how the curriculum could be made more engaging for all students. Many participants commented on the importance of making the material relevant to students, having a balance of topics, and meeting students' individual needs and choices. They suggested that the curriculum needs to provide many more connections to real-life situations in order to create meaningful, interesting, and rich learning experiences. Other participants noted that in order for students to be engaged in their learning, curriculum must be timely and age-appropriate and must make reference to current and emerging media – for example, social networking and blogging.

The working group noted that, with the introduction of Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy in 2009, there is a consistent commitment to support positive learning environments "so that all students can feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning, supported by the teachers and staff from whom they are learning, and welcome in the environment in which they are learning" (*Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009*, p. 12).

Students, parents, and teachers confirmed that the curriculum needs to better reflect the diversity of Ontario's learners and communities, incorporate culturally relevant learning, and foster authentic learning. Many students believe that their learning program does not reflect their needs, cultural identity, or personal experiences. For example, participants indicated that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners need to see connections to their life experiences, and experience learning that is holistic and connected to their community. Other jurisdictions, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and the United Kingdom, have identified equity, diversity, and living in a globalized world (as well as information and communication technology) as important considerations for relevant curriculum development.

Teachers indicated that support for flexibility in addressing local and regional needs would be helpful. In addition, teachers would like support in planning lessons and learning activities that are rooted in both real-life and cultural contexts that are meaningful to their students.

When instruction is anchored in the context of the learner's world, students are more likely to take ownership of their learning. The working group recognizes that when students see themselves reflected in what they are studying they are more likely to stay engaged and find school relevant. Revised curriculum documents now contain a section on equity and inclusive education (including antidiscrimination), and expectations are accompanied by examples, teacher prompts, and student responses that support teachers in planning effective programs. These improvements will become more apparent in the next group of revised curriculum documents to be released.

Participants indicated that technology has the potential to deepen learning and foster engagement and that students need to build and use emerging technology skills as part

of their school experience. Addressing diverse learners' needs and varied learning styles through the use of technology was supported as an effective means of engaging students. Based on these findings, the working group identified emerging technology as an area in which teachers and students need support and training.

Finally, the working group noted that students selected positive encouragement as the most important factor for helping them learn and be successful in school, followed by personalized teaching and learning workshops. This finding supports the importance of student engagement as noted in *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*, which states: "When students are engaged in their learning and social environment, they are better able to develop the skills and knowledge and grasp the opportunities that can help them reach their full potential, pursue lifelong learning, and contribute to a prosperous, cohesive society. As we move forward with our education agenda, we will bring new energy to our efforts to foster student engagement, both academic and social" (*Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*, Winter 2008, p. 12).

Supports for Professional Learning

Teachers indicated that they would benefit from support and professional learning to assist them in continuing to create a well-planned integrated, differentiated program to support a wide range of student learning styles, skill levels, and levels of prior knowledge.

Teachers made the following suggestions related to supports for professional learning:

- Job-embedded professional learning needs to be differentiated to meet the needs of teachers at different stages in their careers, from initial teacher education onwards.
- Professional learning communities need to take on a bigger support role with respect to implementation by undertaking ongoing collegial and collaborative inquiry into practice.
- Teachers benefit from planning with grade/division teams.
- Teachers benefit from support in using technologies in their daily teaching.
- A designated province-wide professional development day with a curriculum focus would support the development of subject-specific knowledge and/or cross-curricular approaches to teaching.

In addition, participants suggested that future curriculum documents be developed as living web documents with hotlinks to resources or related policies, as an aid to planning and implementation. For example, the recently released *Education Policy and Program Update to June 30, 2009* is a web-enabled resource that includes hotlinks to other documents on the ministry website and will be updated at regular intervals. The documents should also be searchable, participants suggested, in a way that would allow teachers to access, and do program planning around, clustered subject expectations and cross-curricular "big ideas".

Some teachers indicated the importance of having access to resources such as units of study, sample lesson plans, exemplars, assessment tools, and teacher guides (e.g., the

ministry's *Guides to Effective Instruction* in reading, literacy, writing, and mathematics). The working group noted that, since it is current ministry practice to develop and distribute training materials concurrently with revised curriculum documents, continued communication and outreach are required to ensure that teachers are updated about all available resources to support curriculum implementation and delivery.

Participants suggested that there is a gap between training conducted for board teams in regional sessions and the support that ultimately reaches the classroom teacher. They indicated that teachers should have access to high-quality training through accessible means such as web-based professional learning sessions, for example. These might include video clips of exemplary instructional practices. Accessible school-level training for implementation of revised curriculum would increase teacher confidence and self-efficacy and support teachers in developing more-integrated classroom programs.

Participants suggested that successful implementation of curriculum continues to require opportunities for the whole school to build capacity around the curriculum and to build programs for its students. In addition, continuing to build teacher capacity and encourage teacher leadership was identified as crucial to the success of curriculum implementation and student learning. It was also suggested that board teams, regional teams, and provincial teams be available to support implementation of new curriculum. The working group recognizes the importance of instructional leadership at the school level as a focus for curriculum implementation. School principals in particular play an important role in developing a shared vision and focus for teaching and learning, and more supports for principals as instructional leaders may be helpful.

In addition to the supports previously discussed, educators suggested additional areas in which they might benefit from support and professional learning. These included:

- enhancing technology skills;
- deepening learning about inclusiveness and global perspectives;
- incorporating creative thinking skills and learning skills in a variety of subjects;
- promoting integration of environmental education, healthy choices and active living, and character education, citizenship education, and social skills development in teachers' classroom programs;
- continuing to deepen supports for literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.

Respondents from French-language school boards also indicated that supports are needed to help them adopt a cultural teaching approach to foster the development of students' French-language cultural identity.

Moving the Curriculum Forward

The current curriculum review process was praised by participants for its inclusiveness and transparency, and for its fostering of inter-agency and community partnerships. Some participants suggested continuing to broaden the scope of consultation during the review process and bringing more partners to the table so that diverse perspectives are even more fully represented. Participants also suggested that the curriculum review process needs to remain sensitive to regional, urban, and rural needs and differences.

ONTARIO'S CURRICULUM REVIEW PROCESS

In 2003, the Ministry of Education began a curriculum review process in which the curriculum policy document for every subject is reviewed and revised on a seven-year cycle. This important process is intended to ensure that the curriculum remains current and relevant, and that it is age-appropriate for students in every grade. The review is based on extensive research and consultation, and culminates in the work of writing teams comprising educators from across Ontario who have specialized subject expertise. Some of the changes introduced as a result of recent reviews include the following:

- A reduction in the amount of content in each subject
- The addition of examples and other features to assist teachers in lesson preparation and planning
- The provision of more information to assist teachers in supporting English language learners, planning programs for students with special education needs, using technology, and dealing with other important aspects of program planning and classroom instruction
- The embedding of expectations that allow students to develop literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills in all subjects
- The alignment of curriculum expectations with current policy initiatives, such as those in the areas of environmental education (*Acting Today, Shaping Tomorrow: A Policy Framework for Environmental Education in Ontario Schools, 2009*); Aboriginal education (*Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2004*); equity and inclusive education (*Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009*); and French-language education (*Politique d'aménagement linguistique de l'Ontario pour l'éducation en langue française, 2004*)

The working group concurs with the finding that the current curriculum review process benefits from the involvement of a variety of stakeholders, and notes that the ministry continues to welcome suggestions to broaden the process further. For example, the advice provided by First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educators continues to ensure that Aboriginal perspectives are reflected in the curriculum. Ongoing efforts to broaden student and teacher involvement in the curriculum review process were also encouraged.

Parents are interested in what their children are learning. The working group recognizes the importance of the ongoing involvement of parents in the curriculum review process. Participants encouraged the ministry to communicate more effectively with parents about the content of the curriculum so that common understandings of student programs could be built at the community level. Feedback included the suggestion that the ministry provide information materials written specifically for parents about the curriculum. Alberta has seen the value of this approach and provides excellent information for parents about the curriculum, such as curriculum handbooks for parents and *Curriculum Express*, a resource for parents of English language learners. Quebec has also developed materials so that parents can better understand what their children are learning in school. (See Appendix B for links.)

There was consensus that the review process needs to go beyond a subject-based approach. While this approach has led to increased coherence of student learning from

Grade 1 to Grade 12 in each subject discipline and has supported student transitions between divisions, participants now want the review to focus on looking across subjects and making connections between them while maintaining a developmentally appropriate sequence. Some teachers emphasized the benefits of better curriculum connections within and between subjects and grades. Consideration should be given to how different subject areas are integrated in an elementary classroom and how the curriculum could be revised to facilitate cross-curricular integration.

In addition, it was suggested that, through the curriculum review process, the ministry continue to embed critical literacy, problem-solving skills, research skills, and technology skills in all revised curriculum documents. The working group noted that, in addition to the above suggestion, a number of other suggestions made by participants are currently being addressed by the ministry. These include:

- increasing the focus on skills in the curriculum;
- embedding equity and diversity in the curriculum;
- consulting with postsecondary institutions and employers, and reviewing educational models from other jurisdictions, to ensure that Ontario's curriculum aligns with students' learning needs in 2020 and beyond.

Finally, the working group noted that the Ministry of Education will not be beginning the next review of the curriculum until 2012 and, in the interim, will focus on implementation support for the curriculum that is in the review process or that has already been released.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of its findings both in Ontario and in other Canadian and international jurisdictions, the Working Group on the Elementary Curriculum makes the following recommendations to the Curriculum Council for its consideration.

Curriculum Design

1. The next cycle of the curriculum review process should begin with the development of a coherent organizational Grade 1–12 Curriculum Framework. Within this framework, literacy and numeracy are foundational, along with cross-curricular "big ideas" (themes, life skills, and values). Within each subject, expectations should continue to be consolidated and streamlined to focus on key concepts and deeper understanding.
2. Further work needs to be undertaken by the Ministry of Education to develop the Grade 1–12 Curriculum Framework, including the cross-curricular "big ideas" (themes, life skills, and values).
3. Future curriculum review should be a dynamic process that responds to new knowledge and research relating to teaching and learning, as well as subject content, and that takes advantage of enabling technology tools to support a fluid approach to curriculum design, review, and implementation.

Curriculum Implementation

4. Teachers' professional learning should continue to build teacher capacity and support teacher leadership in developing and delivering programs that address the "big ideas" in curriculum.
5. Ongoing, job-embedded professional learning should support teachers in continuing to develop and use instructional strategies, including those involving the use of technology, that maximize student engagement and student achievement and draw on meaningful real-life contexts and diverse cultural contexts.
6. Instructional leadership should be fostered to support implementation of curriculum at the school and board level.
7. The ministry should continue to facilitate the sharing of effective tools, resources, and practices to support curriculum implementation.
8. The ministry should develop electronically linked curriculum documents and electronic tools that facilitate cross-curricular planning and planning for combined grades (for example, tools that enable searches for "big ideas" across subject areas, on the model of the environmental education "Scope and Sequence" resource document).

Engagement of Partners

9. The ministry should continue to expand its engagement with stakeholders representing diverse communities and perspectives to ensure a culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate curriculum that is more inclusive and engaging for students.

Communication for Shared Understanding

10. Communication strategies should be undertaken to support a shared understanding of the Grade 1–12 curriculum – and, when developed, the Grade 1–12 Curriculum Framework – including key terminology, principles, and concepts such as "big ideas".

11. A communication plan should be developed to deepen the engagement of students, parents, teachers, principals, other school and system partners, and stakeholders with the curriculum review, development, and implementation process.

APPENDIX A:
THE WORKING GROUP ON THE ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM

Jean-Luc Bernard (Co-Chair)
Jean-Luc Bernard is Director of Education, Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest. He is also Chair of the Board of Directors of the Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques and of the Centre de santé de Toronto. He has been a member and vice-chair of the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (MACSE) for a period of seven years. Jean-Luc has served as an education officer and regional superintendent in the Toronto area regional office of the Field Services Branch, Ministry of Education, and as a member of the inter-ministerial committee for the Best Start initiative and the Steering Committee for Early Years Programs.

Gerry Connelly (Co-Chair)
Gerry Connelly is a former Director of Education, Toronto District School Board, and is currently on contract at York University as Coordinator in Field Development and Co-Director of the Sustainable Education Academy. Gerry has served as Director of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch, Ministry of Education, and was responsible for developing the K–12 Ontario curriculum and standard report card. Her career includes teaching and administration in both rural and urban environments in Canada and the United States, and advising on curriculum development in Eastern Europe and South Africa. A recipient of numerous awards for service and outstanding achievement, Gerry currently serves as a board member of nine education and service organizations in Ontario.

Kathy Broad
Kathy Broad is Executive Director of Initial Teacher Education at OISE / UT and has also served as Director of the OISE / UT Elementary Program and the School–University Partnership Office. Kathy's recent teaching and research focuses upon teacher education, induction, and development and she has been involved in a variety of curriculum reform initiatives, teacher education projects, and research studies with teachers and schools both locally and internationally. Prior to her arrival at OISE, Kathy was an elementary teacher, area resource teacher, and principal with Bluewater District School Board. She has received awards for teaching, curriculum innovation, and leadership.

Tony Ceelen
Tony Ceelen is the Principal of St. Andrew Catholic School in the Halton Catholic District School Board, which was recognized as a "School on the Move" in 2007. Tony taught for twenty-one years in Grades 3 to 8, was a vice-principal with the board for three years,

and is currently in his fourth year as a principal. He recently completed his Supervisory Officer's Qualifications. He is a recipient of both the "Canada's Outstanding Principal" award and the President's Award from the Halton OECTA Elementary Unit.

Elaine Dénommé

Elaine Dénommé is the Principal of École Publique Lionel-Gauthier in the Conseil scolaire de district du Nord-Est de l'Ontario. Elaine has taught at both the primary and junior levels, and has many years experience in special education – as a special education resource teacher with the Timmins District School Board, an educational diagnostician with Integrated Services for Northern Children (ISNC), and Special Education and Curriculum Coordinator and, later, Chef des Services Pédagogiques for the Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario. Elaine's school was designated a "School on the Move" in 2007 and was also recognized with an award for exceptional leadership by EQAO.

Jonathan Poon

Jonathan Poon is a primary teacher and divisional chair at San Lorenzo Ruiz Catholic School in the York Catholic District School Board. Jonathan has taught Grades 1 to 3 over the past seven years, and has qualified as a specialist in both Special Education and Computers in the Classroom. He has also earned qualifications for teaching intermediate English and senior law and recently completed his Principal's Qualifications. In 2005, Jonathan was chosen by the York Catholic District School Board to represent the board at the Canadian Ministers of Education Conference with his initiative "Technology Enhanced Learning: Initiatives in Literacy and Numeracy".

Judy Reuben

Judy Reuben is the Principal of Oliver M. Smith-Kawenni:io School and has thirty-two years experience as a teacher, learning resource teacher, policy writer, assistant principal, and principal with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. She has worked with First Nations communities in both northern and southern Ontario and, as a sessional instructor with Brock University, trains teacher candidates in the Native Teacher Education Program. Judy has volunteered with the Accreditation Panel of the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario Association of Deans of Education Joint Committee. Her article "Aboriginal Winter Games" was featured in the 2002 Canadian Olympic Resource Kit, which was distributed to schools across Canada. Among other awards and recognition, in 1985 Judy earned the Ontario region award for Outstanding Woman of the Year for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

André Savard

André Savard is the Principal of École élémentaire catholique Jean-Paul II in the Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud. André has held a number of positions, including teacher, educational consultant, director of programming, and, since 2003, principal of secondary and elementary schools. He has been involved in the development and publication of several pedagogical documents with the Centre franco-ontarien de ressources pédagogiques and with the Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud. André has also written several articles, in particular "Les données mises en pratique: Être au cœur de l'apprentissage des enfants", which was published in *OQRE Branché* in spring 2007.

Kathy Smeeth

Kathy Smeeth is a curriculum coordinator with the Rainy River District School Board. She was a JK–8 classroom teacher for fifteen years prior to assuming her current role, providing training and coaching, and developing resources, in the areas of curriculum implementation, mathematics, science, and social studies instruction, and assessment and evaluation. She has been involved in numerous committees at the board, focused on assessment and instruction, student success, system PD planning, and "schools in the middle". She has a particular interest in teacher learning and leadership.

James Steeves

James Steeves is an intermediate communications teacher at Dolphin Senior School in the Peel District School Board. He began his career teaching ethics, philosophy, and peace studies at McMaster University, Humber College, and the University of Western Ontario and went on to work as both a core teacher and communications teacher with the Peel board. He has received specialized training in diversity and social justice, critical thinking, and SRA Direct Instruction and has written a wide range of resources and articles for educators. James has also worked and volunteered for Community Living Hamilton, the Hamilton YWCA, and the Hamilton and District Extend-A-Family.

Sylvie Tremblay

Sylvie Tremblay is Superintendent of Education, Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, responsible for pedagogical services, special education services, and supervision of schools. Sylvie has been in the education sector since 1992. Prior to her current role, she was a secondary school teacher, head of department, vice-principal, and principal of a secondary school and director of programming for Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12.

APPENDIX B:
SUMMARY OF INTERJURISDICTIONAL FINDINGS

CANADIAN JURISDICTIONS

Alberta

Alberta's curriculum is outcomes-based – it describes what students are expected to know and be able to do each year in each subject. In addition, Curriculum Handbooks for Parents, Curriculum Summaries, and Curriculum Express contain information for parents on subjects, programs, and courses available in Alberta schools. Alberta has a 10- to 12-year cycle of curriculum review ensure a current, relevant, and age-appropriate curriculum. Inspiring Education, a province-wide consultation was launched in spring 2009. The perspectives and ideas that come out of this consultation will be used to develop a policy framework for the overall direction, principles, and long-term goals of education in Alberta over the next two decades.

Web links:

http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program.aspx
http://www.inspiringeducation.alberta.ca/
http://education.alberta.ca/media/1115263/arts_ed_framework.pdf
Curriculum Handbooks for Parents:
http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/handbook.aspx
Curriculum Summaries:
http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/summaries.aspx
Curriculum Express:
http://www.education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/express.aspx

Atlantic Provinces

Curriculum in the Atlantic Provinces is based on the Atlantic Canada Framework for Essential Graduation Learnings in Schools, which is an outcomes-based framework. The framework provides a clear statement of what is expected of students at graduation and at key stages of their education. The process is flexible and accommodates differences in program offerings in each of the provinces. A key feature of this framework is the Essential Graduation Learnings, which provide a consistent vision for the development of a coherent and relevant core curriculum. Essential Graduation Learnings include aesthetic expression; citizenship; communication; personal development; problem solving; and technological competence.

Web links:

http://www.ednet.ns.ca/pdfdocs/curriculum/camet/essential-grad-learnings-e.pdf

British Columbia

While adhering to three goals of education – intellectual development, human and social development, and career development – British Columbia's Primary Program focuses on the whole child by integrating the following areas of development: aesthetic and artistic development; emotional and social development; intellectual development; physical development and well-being; and development of social responsibility. Career development takes on increasing importance as students progress through school. By addressing the development of the whole child, it provides for the development of traits and attitudes that contribute to career awareness and development, such as taking pride in one's work, understanding the relationship of work to daily life, and working well with others. The Primary Program helps teachers prepare students to attain their career and occupational objectives and to assist in the development of effective work habits and flexibility to deal with change.

Web links:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/primary_program/primary_prog.pdf

Quebec

The Quebec Education Program (QEP) is characterized essentially by its competency-based approach and its focus on the learning process. The (QEP) defines a competency as a set of behaviours based on the effective mobilization and use of a range of resources. The program includes cross-curricular competencies, broad themes for learning, a preschool education program, and programs of study grouped into five subject areas. Students develop competencies in each subject in addition to cross-curricular competencies. The latter include intellectual, methodological, personal, and social and communication-related competencies. Five broad areas of learning are also included in the curriculum: health and well-being; personal and career planning; media literacy; environmental awareness and consumer rights and responsibilities; and citizenship and community life. These broad areas of learning are explored as an integral part of all the regular subjects.

Web links:

http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/lancement/prog_formation/index.htm

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, a five-year outcomes-based curriculum renewal process began in 2007–08. The purpose of the renewal is to sustain and strengthen the curriculum and to ensure relevance and consistency for students and provide ease of access and use for teachers. The key elements of the curriculum renewal include the development of a New Curriculum Framework and the incorporation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit content, perspectives, and ways of knowing in the curriculum. In addition to subject-specific goals, outcomes, and indicators, the revised curricula include "throughlines", which identify connections from the broad areas of learning to the cross-curricular competencies, to the subject-specific goals, and to the outcomes and indicators. The Core Curriculum is developmental in nature and based on a Kindergarten to Grade 12 continuum.

Web links:

http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/department-overview/
http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/policy

Canadian Council on Learning

In 2007, the Canadian Council on Learning published a report, *Redefining How Success Is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning*. Three tables of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit educators and researchers were convened to develop three models of learning to inform the development of culturally relevant curricula.

> First Nations Holistic Lifelong Learning Model: For First Nations people, the purpose of learning is to honour and protect the earth and ensure the long-term sustainability of life. To illustrate the organic and self-regenerative nature of First Nations learning, the Holistic Lifelong Learning Model uses a stylistic graphic of a living tree. The tree depicts the cycles of learning for an individual and identifies the influences that affect individual learning and collective well-being.
>
> The Métis Holistic Lifelong Learning Model: The Métis understand learning in the context of the "Sacred Act of Living a Good Life", a perspective that incorporates learning experienced in the physical world and acquired by "doing" and a distinct form of knowledge – sacred laws governing relationships within the community and the world at large – that comes from the Creator.
>
> Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model: The Inuit Holistic Lifelong Learning Model depicts the linkage between Inuit lifelong learning and community well-being and uses a stylistic graphic of an Inuit blanket toss (a game often played at Inuit celebrations) and a circular path (the "Journey of Lifelong Learning") to portray the Inuit learning journey and its connection to community well-being.

Web links:

http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/KnowledgeCentres/AboriginalLearning/OurWork/RedefineSuccessInABLearning.htm?Language=EN
http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/AboutCCL/KnowledgeCentres/AboriginalLearning/OurWork/RedefineSuccessInABLearning.htm?Language=FR

JURISDICTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Australia

Australia currently has thirty-four separate organizations contributing to the development of new curricula and is addressing the management of curriculum, assessment, and reporting at a national level. Continua for literacy and numeracy skills and information and communications technology will be a foundation of the curriculum. The curriculum will outline the essential skills, knowledge, and capabilities that all young Australians are entitled to access, regardless of their social or economic background or the school they attend. The national curriculum will also provide parents and teachers with a clear understanding of what needs to be covered in each subject at each year level. It will seek to equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge, and capabilities that will enable them to effectively engage with and prosper in society, compete in a globalized world, and thrive in the information-rich workplaces of the future.

Web links:

http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum.html
http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Curriculum_Design_Paper_.pdf

China

The new curriculum for compulsory education in China is competence-oriented and has an added focus on hands-on experiences; local conditions; traditions and social developments; and character education. There is emphasis on education as an undertaking that needs to adapt to future needs; therefore it is necessary to adhere to the principle of "Three Orientations", which means education should be oriented towards modernization, the whole world, and the future. The new curriculum is based on the premise that school education should prepare students for the needs of the future and society and for their lifelong development. To meet those needs, curriculum should provide hands-on experience and field-work activities in addition to knowledge learning. Major forms of such experience/activities include research-oriented studies, community service, information technology, and hands-on working activities. Curriculum practice has gone from being tests-oriented to a curriculum for whole-person development, and from an emphasis on academic knowledge as an aim of education to a focus on the acquisition of lifelong competencies.

Web links:

http://www.slo.nl/organisatie/international/conference (see: Zhu Muju, Basic Education and Curriculum Reform in China, March 2009)

http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/en/level3.jsp?tablename=1242700904263396&infoid=1244084931385369&title=The%209th%205-Year%20Plan%20for%20China's%20Educational%20Development%20and%20the%20Development%20Outline%20by%202010

Finland

In Finland, the national core curriculum sets out the underlying values, mission, aims, and approaches for basic education. A learning plan for each student is an expectation. The core curriculum sets out the subjects of the curriculum. More than fifteen subjects are identified, but schools can combine these as they choose. Core content is described as activities and skills rather than detailed subject-based content. This places the onus on the municipality and more importantly on the school to develop its curriculum to meet learners' needs as well as meeting national expectations. In addition, the core curriculum specifies cross-curricular themes, including growth as a person; cultural identity and internationalism; media skills and communication; participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship; responsibility for the environment, well-being, and a sustainable future; safety and traffic; and technology and the individual. The cross-curricular themes are identified in terms of objectives and core content and are integrated into numerous subjects. In formulating the curriculum, the themes are to be included in the core and optional subjects and in joint events such as assemblies, and they are to be manifest in the school's operational culture.

Web links:

http://www.oph.fi/english/publications/2009/national_core_curricula_for_basci_education

Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the curriculum aims to provide students with comprehensive and balanced learning opportunities, lay the foundation for lifelong learning, and achieve all-round development. A new curriculum framework is being implemented which

allows for different interpretations of content and flexible use of different learning strategies and styles to suit individual needs. It has three interconnected components: key learning areas, generic skills, and values and attitudes.

The organization of the school curriculum is structured around fundamental and connected concepts of major knowledge domains. These provide the context for the development and application of generic skills and of values and attitudes. Generic skills are fundamental to helping students learn better. They are to be developed through learning and teaching in the contexts of different subjects, and are transferable to different learning situations. They include collaboration skills, communication skills, creativity, critical thinking skills, information technology skills, numeracy skills, problem-solving skills, self-management skills, and study skills. Values are qualities that students should develop as principles underlying conduct and decision making, while attitudes are personal dispositions needed to perform a task well.

Web links:
http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeid=2877
http://www.edb.gov.hk/index.aspx?nodeID=2365&langno=1

New Zealand
In New Zealand, the national curriculum sets the direction for education. Schools and teachers have the flexibility to make adjustments to meet student needs. As such, curriculum is designed and interpreted in a three-stage process: as the national curriculum, the school curriculum, and the classroom curriculum. The New Zealand Curriculum takes as its starting point a vision of young people as lifelong learners who are confident and creative, connected, and actively involved. It includes a set of principles on which to base curriculum decision making. It sets out values that are to be encouraged, modelled, and explored. It defines five key competencies that are critical to sustained learning and effective participation in society and that underline the emphasis on lifelong learning. The curriculum also includes effective pedagogy, reinforcing the importance of effective teaching and learning and providing guidance for teachers. The designing and planning sections provide guidance to schools on working with their communities to design and implement the curriculum, to plan for clear learning objectives, and to assess for learning. Schools are advised on how to incorporate significant themes such as sustainability, citizenship, enterprise, globalization, and financial literacy into their teaching programs. Principles include: high expectations; Treaty of Waitangi; cultural diversity; inclusion; learning to learn; community engagement; coherence; and future focus. Te Marautanga o Aotearoa is a partner document of The New Zealand Curriculum which is based on Māori philosophies and principles.

Web links:
http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-documents/The-New-Zealand-Curriculum

Singapore
Singapore is currently adopting all of the recommendations made by the Primary Education Review and Implementation Committee in the spring of 2009. The proposed changes to primary education focus on equipping primary students not just with content knowledge but also with the skills and values to thrive in a fasting-changing and globalized future (e.g., by placing greater emphasis on non-academic programs within the

curriculum); introducing more-holistic assessment to support learning (e.g., by placing less importance on examinations and encouraging the use of rubrics to assess students on their development and skills acquisition); recruiting quality educators through strengthened training and professional development; and enhancing the infrastructure of all government schools to ensure access to admission in local communities.

Web links:
http://www.moe.gov.sg/initiatives/peri/files/peri-report.pdf

United Kingdom
In the United Kingdom, the proposed new primary national curriculum is organized into three parts and sets out a national entitlement for what all children should be taught in the primary years (ages 5 to 11).

The first part consists of curriculum aims, which inform all aspects of curriculum planning, teaching, and learning at whole-school and subject levels. The curriculum aims for all young people to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress, and achieve; confident individuals who are able to lead safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives; and responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society. The second part consists of essentials for learning and life, which are: literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology capability, learning and thinking skills, personal and emotional skills, and social skills. The essentials for learning and life are designed to be embedded in and developed across the curriculum. The third part consists of six areas of learning: understanding the arts; understanding English, communication, and languages; historical, geographical, and social understanding; mathematical understanding; understanding physical development, health, and well-being; and scientific and technological understanding. Within each area of learning, curriculum progression is set out in three phases: early, middle, and later. This phased progression is designed to help teachers plan appropriately challenging experiences for students.

Web links:
http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00499-2009&

09-300
ISBN 978-1-4435-2331-8 (Print)
ISBN 978-1-4435-2332-5 (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-4435-2333-2 (TXT)

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